Vallejo Museum <valmuse@pacbell.net> 8/29/2006 3:26 PM

Re: John Grider article

To snicsnac@comcast.net

Sharon -

Very nice job on the John Grider article. I'm sure you will keep uncovering many more interesting tidbits about him but, as you said, at some point you have to just sit down and write what you've got.

Just a couple suggestions/corrections:

In the paragraph that starts: "Derrick, a former Vallejo pound master..." you might want to add: "Wyatt, who IN SOME ACCOUNTS, was called the "first white resident." Some would argue that B.F. Osborn was the first... and it's not really clear to me, so adding those words qualifies your statement.

Also, in the two paragraphs just below that, Brownlie is twice mis-spelled as "Brownie." Jerry Bowen might not catch that typo.

Otherwise, great article! I will scan and email the photo to Jerry today.

-- Jim K.
----- Original Message -----
From: <snicsnac@comcast.net>
To: <valmuse@pacbell.net>
Sent: Saturday, August 26, 2006 3:16 PM
Subject: John Grider article

> Jim:
>
> Here is the Grider article. I would appreciate any feedback.
>
> Jerry Bowen's e-mail address is:
>
> jerrybowen@earthlink.net
>
> I will let him know you are forwarding the Grider photo.
>
> Sharon
> 552-3934
>
> *****
>
> John Grider's Century: a Black Bear Flag Veteran's story
> By Sharon McGriff-Payne
>
> A Vallejo newspaper marked the passing of John Grider in 1924 with a front page tribute to this little known veteran of the Bear Flag Revolt, the incident that heralded California's statehood.
>
> The Vallejo Evening Chronicle's article entitled "Interesting Sketch of a Negro Pioneer," was both remarkable and ironic in its timing. It was in

Grider's death that many Vallejoans first learned of this former slave's contributions and connection to both the state and city, whose birth he witnessed..

The lone African American listed among the Vallejo Society of California Pioneers - a distinction given to men who came to the state before
1849- Grider lived out his life in near obscurity during his 70 years in Vallejo.

More than 160 years ago, Grider was among a group of American settlers, who, on the morning of June 14, 1846, took part in in the event that launched the struggle for California's statehood. This incident, which would later be known
as the Bear Flag Revolt, led to the capture and imprisonment of General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo at Sutter's Fort. Vallejo eventually returned to Sonoma after the United States took control of the state in 1848..

Grider, one of at least six African-American men known to be present at the
revolt, has been credited with, among other things, finding the paint to illustrate the original bear flag, which was adopted as a symbol of the Americans. To this day the r flag, with its depiction of a grizzly bear, serves as the official state flag.

Rarely are men of African descent mentioned in any Bear Flag Party accounts.
Delilah L. Beasley, author of the groundbreaking The Negro Trail Blazers of California, published in 1919, wrote that Grider came to California through Mexico in 1841 with his owner, Major George H. Wyatt, Dick
Gardner, and Major (James) Burney.

Grider, a horse trainer for the Wyatt party, worked as a hostler throughout most of his long work life. Grider's skills as an excellent horseman,
his work ethic, and his kind nature, gave him respect among many.

In Beasley's account , Grider said he and theWyatt party originally came to California in 1841 from Silver (probably Sevier) County, Tennessee.
The party made their way through Mexico, traveling up through San Francisco. By 1846 they were in Sonoma, the site of the impending revolt.

In the 1914 interview with Beasley, Grider said there were at least six African Americans who were Bear Flag Party members and that they all were present during the revolt. Those men included himself, Jacob Dodson, James Duff, Charles G. Gains, Billy Gaston, Joe McAfee, and "Ben," a servant of Lieutenant Archibald Gillespie.

While there are some written accounts of Dodson, a free born African-American who served as a scout for expeditions by John C. Fremont into California, as well as written information on Duff, Beasley's interview with Grider acknowledges other African Americans in Sonoma in 1846.

While scores of books written about the Bear Flag Revolt have extolled the actions of white settlers, Grider, who said he
served as flag bearer following the incident, said the rebellion "didn't amount to much." While Grider's whereabouts can be accounted for,

following the Bear Flag incident, the Gains and Gaston are not known. Joe (or Joseph) McAfee, according to the 1860 federal census, settled in Benicia where he working as a hotel servant. By 1870, McAfee had moved to Santa Cruz.

In the 1924 obituary, Grider's friend, F.W. Derrick, said Grider remained in Sonoma following the Bear Flag incident and worked for General Mariano G. Vallejo for a few years. By 1849, the state's Gold Rush was in full swing and Wyatt 's group, including Grider, headed to Calaveras County in the Sierra foothills.

While the lure of gold at Murphy's Diggings would bring Wyatt, a shrewd businessman riches, Grider's mind, no doubt, was set on freedom.

Leonard Withington Noyes, an eastern businessman who made his way West in search of gold in 1849, wrote in his diary that Wyatt was elected recorder (or alcalde) at Murphy's. As alcalde, Wyatt was the law. By 1850, Murphy's Camp was
overcrowded and one of the most successful of the gold mines. Derisively, Noyes wrote that Wyatt "had a lot of niggers and southern friends who were of course to be favored," for their choice in gold claims. In yet another account, Wyatt "profited to the extent of two dollars for each claim registered."

Wyatt's and Grider's time in the mines proved successful. In the Beasley account Grider "paid Major Wyatt $800 to bring his mother (Caroline) to California." Upon his mother's arrival to the West Coast, Grider purchased a home for her in Marysville, where she spent the remaining days of her life.

By 1851, Solano County deeds show that Wyatt, sometimes alone, sometimes with others purchased property in new found Vallejo. By 1854 these properties would number 50 lots.
Grider in Vallejo

Derrick, a former Vallejo pound master, said Grider told him that Wyatt set
him free in 1850. By the end of 1850, Wyatt, who was called the "first white resident" of Vallejo, had built the Central Hotel, also known as Wyatt's Hotel. This hotel, located at the southwest corner of Marin and Maine streets,
served as the residence of many of the legislators who lived their during the January 1852 session when Vallejo served as the state capitol.
.

In 1850, Wyatt also opened a livery stable with business partner John Brownlie. Grider would work at the Virginia Street stable for several years. .

By the mid-1850s, Wyatt sold his share of the livery stable to Brownie and left the area. Grider remained at the livery stable. Among his skills, Grider worked as a veterinary surgeon, a skill worth its weight in gold in an era dependent on
horses and other animals..

Derrick, one of the last surviving Pony Express riders when he died at the age of 96 in 1938, worked with Grider for 10 years in the Brownie stable. "No kinder hearted man or better man ever than 'Black John' Grider," Derrick said in the 1924 obituary.

During the early days of the city, Grider was a familiar sight as he drove his six horse team wagon down Georgia Street to the wharves where he unloaded wheat and hay in the schooners docked there.

Grider, who stood at 5-9, "was one of the finest roughrider I ever knew, " Derrick recalled.

Derrick said he would watch as Grider "drove a big buckskin horse named Don from
John Brownlie's stable into the bay clear out from the foot of Capitol Street. The horse swam around Virginia and Georgia street wharves and came to the foot of York Street."

In remembering his friend's equestrian skills, Derrick recalled that he and Grider often drove the livery rigs into the bay at the foot of Capitol
Street and made the "horses swim over their backs to get the mud off of them."

Grider's horsemanship was also on display during Fourth of July celebrations, said Mike Dervin in the 1924 obituary. Dervin said Grider and a man named Stewart
"would ride wild horses in the lower block of Georgia Street" during the celebrations.

Throughout his long work life, Grider, who had no known family except his mother, worked for various livery stables owned by Henry Connolly and George Higson or as a laborer on area ranches and farms.

As a laborer, Grider worked for a farmer named Hannibal who owned land at the Fleming Ranch (now the Flemingtowne area). From there Grider went to work punching cattle on the Paddy Ranch located at White Sulphur Springs Valley (now Blue Rock Springs)

In the 1880s, Grider went to work for the Vallejo Steam Laundry, where it is believed he ended his work career in the late 1890s or early 1900s.

At the dawn of a new century, Grider, whose life had centered and depended on horses, was
now aging. The first automobiles were starting to appear on the streets of Vallejo. Perhaps, it was a fitting turn of events for Grider , whose long life had been touched by so many major events.

The Bear Flag Veteran finally recognized
By 1914, now nearing 90, finally got his recognition.

On September 9, 1914, during a huge Admission Day celebration held in Vallejo and hosted by the Vallejo Parlor No. 71, Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West, Grider's contribution to the state was recognized.

The September 11 edition of the Vallejo Times Herald said Grider, the Bear Flag veteran, riding in a special automobile was among those "cheered all
along the route." Even though the writer misspelled Grider's name - calling
him 'John Cryder' - the tribute by more than 40,000 people who had converged on Vallejo that day, was not lost on African-American throughout the Bay Area.

Following the parade, George Van Blake, another early African American resident of Vallejo, wrote a letter to Beasley and said Grider "was treated
royally and accorded every honor pertaining to the hospitality of the city."

Grider was also cited in an account in the Western Outlook, an African American newspaper based in San Francisco. While the October 7, 1914 edition of the Western Outlook in which the article appeared is no longer available, Beasley quoted the article in her book, noting that Grider, "the only survivor of the Bear Flag Party rode in solitary state in an automobile, a vehicle his wildest imagination never pictured in the strenuous days of California's fight for membership into the Union."

In 1916, an ailing Grider moved into the Fairfield County Hospital where he lived for more than nine years before his death. Back then, the county hospital was considered a combination hospital and "poorhouse," where indigent and sickly county residents lived.

Grider, whose death certificate said he died of "arteria sclerosis, " was buried on December 23, 1924, the day after his death. He is believed to be buried in a common grave in Fairfield-Suisun Cemetery in Fairfield.

Sources:
Beasley, Delilah L, (1919). The Negro Trail Blazers of California, p. 125
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Noyes, Leonard Withington . Diary of Leonard Withington Noyes (1850-1868)), p. 46.
Coke Wood, Richard. (1949) Murphy's, Queen of the Sierra, p.5. Published by the Calaveras Californian.
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City, county directories from 1869, 1870, 1874, 1879 and 1896.

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